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CONTACT:

Sam Hodder, TPL's Senior Project Manager, (207) 772-7424 x 1

Jim Connors, Maine Coastal Program Senior Planner, 207-287-8938

Maquoit Bay Tops NOAA's CELCP Project Rankings; Stockton Harbor also Recommended for Funding

WASHINGTON, DC – The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the Maine Coastal Program announced today that Maquoit Bay, a Maine-proposed coastal conservation project, is ranked first in the nation for federal funding by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP). A second Maine project in Stockton Harbor ranked 14th on the priority list submitted to Congress.

TPL holds an option to purchase the Maquoit Bay property, and is holding it off the market while working with partners to secure conservation funding. The Coastal Program, working with the project partners, submitted the projects to NOAA for program consideration in the FY 07 federal budget. The projects are strongly supported by U.S. Senators Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, and U.S. Congressmen Tom Allen and Mike Michaud.

The top-ranked Maquoit Bay project, included in the federal agency's list at \$1.45 million, would complete the protection of 170 acres along Casco Bay in the Town of Brunswick. In FY 2006, the Maine congressional delegation secured \$550,000 from the CELCP program towards the project. Additional federal funding is needed to complete the financial package for the project, matching state funding from the Land for Maine's Future Program.

The second Maine project is located in the Town of Stockton Springs on Penobscot Bay and will conserve 7.3 acres of undeveloped shore lands and help secure public access to the water. This project is recommended for \$411,300 to be matched with LMF water access funds, municipal, and local contributions.

Senator Snowe said, "Conserving 170 acres of forested land on Maquoit Bay is extremely important for enhancing public access to the waterfront and protecting significant wildlife habitat along southern Maine's coastline. I am thrilled that the Maquoit Bay project is the top ranked CELCP project in the country for its permanent protection and that a second Maine project, Stockton Harbor, is identified as a high priority for the program."

"I am proud that Maine has the highest ranked CELCP project in the nation. The Maquoit Bay project will protect important wildlife habitat while providing open space and public access opportunities along Maine's southern coast," said Senator Collins. "With a second Maine project highly ranked, this list truly reflects the significance of Maine's coastal resources."

"The fact that NOAA has ranked Maquoit Bay first in the nation for CELCP funding reflects the national significance of Maine's coastal resources," said Representative Allen. "I am a strong supporter of this project and commend the partners for their dedication to protect critical habitat land along the bay for future generations."

"I am very supportive of the Stockton Springs Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Project," said Representative Michaud. "This project balances recreational use with important shoreline and marine resource protection, and will help secure several important pieces of shoreline for the continued use and enjoyment by the public."

"These rankings by NOAA speak to the strength of the Maine conservation plans, developed with strong partnerships at the local, state and national levels," said Governor Baldacci. "Additionally, these projects complement initiatives the State has undertaken to protect valuable natural resources and wildlife habitats, while at the same time ensuring more public access to these state and national treasures."

TPL is helping the Town of Brunswick to purchase the 170-acre Maquoit Bay property, located on the northwest shore of Casco Bay, and conserve it as wildlife habitat and open space for the town. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified the northern end of Maquoit Bay as the most important habitat area in Casco Bay for all species studied, including the eider, brant, Canada goose, eelgrass, common loon, horseshoe crab, and the black duck.

The property is one of the last undeveloped sites on Brunswick's coastline. Very little of the town's 66 miles of coastline is open to public access, and the town has made improving water access one of its top priorities. This property has almost a mile of salt water frontage on the bay and if protected will nearly double the town's current public access to the water.

"NOAA's CELCP program has become an important tool to protect land in critical coastal areas like at Maquoit Bay," said Sam Hodder, TPL's Project Manager. "This ranking wisely recognizes this outstanding conservation effort in Maine that will ultimately protect important habitat, ensure water quality, and provide public access to the bay."

The Town of Brunswick has adopted a Coastal Protection District zoning ordinance to limit development within the Maquoit watershed in an attempt to slow deterioration of the bay. With nearly a mile of trails for walking and cross-country skiing, and canoe and kayak access to Maquoit Bay and Casco Bay, this property has great recreational value to the townspeople as well as other Maine residents and visitors seeking access to coastal waters.

"To have the Maquoit site in Brunswick ranked first in the nation by NOAA for additional conservation funding, pleases us to no end. We are excited to come that much closer to being able to preserve this property for the generations that will come after us," said Donald Gerrish, Town Manager. "We are very hopeful that with NOAA's top support our Washington delegation can see this funding through."

The Town of Stockton Springs is working to purchase three parcels of land on Stockton Harbor that will secure and augment existing public access to the harbor and protect important tidal shore lands and marine resources. With project support from the Coastal Mountains Land Trust, the project will secure public access to the harbor, conserve tidal shore lands, and enhance public open space and recreational opportunities.

Stockton Springs town manager Joe Hayes said “I am ecstatic with the listing coming just before the town meeting this weekend seeking authorization for town funds for the project. I think folks will be extremely happy with the critical State and Federal support for these acquisitions”

Administered by NOAA, the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program provides matching grants to state and local governments to acquire open space in a state's coastal zone and is intended to protect coastal areas with significant conservation, recreation, ecological, cultural or aesthetic value.

The Maine Coastal Program works to sustain coastal resources and enhance the maritime economy. Working in partnerships to promote balanced use and sound management of coastal resources to ensure maintenance of ecologic functions and protection of critical natural values. The Trust for Public Land, established in 1972, specializes in conservation real estate, applying its expertise in negotiations, public finance, and law to protect land for people to enjoy as parks, greenways, community gardens, urban playgrounds, and wilderness. In Maine, TPL has protected over 87,000 acres across the state with projects ranging from city parks and pathways to coastal habitat and working farms and forests.